

Stockholm

Visit Sweden's National Gallery and you'll see grand murals, elegant sculpture, classical paintings. It's exactly the kind of thing you'd expect from an ornate old building across the street from the royal palace. But one floor down you'll find something that seems rather out of place: an art exhibit with copyright in the title.

The exhibit, a brochure explains, "links up with today's debate about illegal downloading of music and film files from the Internet." It'd be interesting enough if illegal downloading was such a live issue that art galleries were using it to try to get kids to come visit (can you imagine the Art Institute of Chicago promoting an exhibit by trying to claim it was related to *Grand Theft Auto?*) but the exhibit actually lived up to its claims: it was a penetrating investigation of what it means to be a creative artist in the age of mass production, one of the most thoughtful art exhibits I've ever seen.

Copyright is still a live issue here in Sweden, perhaps best illustrated by the now world-famous The Pirate Bay website. Despite the site's arrogant name and attitude ("I'm running out of toilet paper, so please send lots of legal documents to our ISP," they [replied](#) to one legal complaint) what it provides is apparently quite legal in Sweden. The site is a BitTorrent tracker, helping your computer get in touch with others who are sharing (usually copyrighted) files. Because it only assists in copyright infringement and doesn't do any copyright violations itself, the Swedish government has had a hard time shutting the site down.

Not that they haven't tried — the MPAA pushed the government into raiding and seizing all the servers of the Bay and their ISP, [prq.se](#), including servers for websites that received special government protection as media outlets.

The Pirate Bay was originally a project of Piratbyrån (lit. "Piracy Bureau"), a Swedish activist organization created to combat Big Content's Antipiratbyrån (lit. "Anti-Piracy Bureau"). The organization's spokesman, Rasmus Fleischer, has become something of a household name in Sweden. Journalists now regularly call the Piratbyrån for responses to claims by the Antipiratbyrån and Fleischer regularly gives talks on the topic of piracy. When I met him he was getting ready for a *Vanity Fair* photo shoot the following day.

Random people on the street here have attended Rasmus Fleischer talks. Indeed, random people on the street here work with famous computer scientists, random people on the street use reddit, random people on the street pirate files. Stockholm has odd streets.

At the same time, a third organization — the Swedish Piratpartiet — is trying to change the laws through electoral mechanisms. Despite being a fairly single-issue political party, in their first election, they won .63% of the popular vote and is now bigger than the Swedish Green Party. (In school mock elections, it won a whopping 4.5%, which gives you some idea of its political base.)

But dividing up the parties into clearly separate organizations isn't the most sensible way of looking at it. For the most part, the organizations consist of IRC channels where friendly people sit around swapping notes and working on little projects they're interested in. For a non-profit, such a structure sounds hideously disorganized. But it's precisely how most free software projects get developed.

A kid drops out of school to intern with the pirates. Some filmmakers put together [a documentary](#) on the subject. Journalists file freedom of information act requests to reveal who's really behind the Pirate Bay raids. Kids post fliers for the Pirate Party. It smells like the beginnings of a movement.

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